ISLAM AS A NORMATIVE FRAMEWORK

Alliances, Legitimating Rhetoric, and Normative Internalization
Egypt and Saudi Arabia after 1967

William Schlickenmaier
20 December 2002
Seminar on Change in the International System

Word count: 12,253

Introduction

The politics of the Middle East have often been described as a realist paradigm, where security concerns dominate all other thoughts, where states refuse to cooperate because of security dilemmas, and where conflict is a chosen medium of discourse.[1] However, this is an oversimplification of the situation in the Middle East. It is true that there has been a great deal of conflict since the end of the First World War – however, it is also striking that much of this conflict has not been Arab against Arab. What it has been is Arab against Israeli, Iranian against Iraqi – with the exception of the 1990 Iraqi invasion of Kuwait and the Yemeni civil war within which Egypt embroiled itself, the lack of conflict among Arab states is somewhat striking.[2] In fact, it is even more striking because this lack of conflict has not come, as a realist might explain, through balancing among coalitions of Arab states; nor has it come through the construction of robust institutions or the propagation of democracy, as a liberal might posit. Rather, the Arab states of the Middle East have confined much of their conflict to that over rhetoric.

Michael Barnett, in *Dialogues in Arab Politics*, posits that conflict among Arab states was symbolic – it was a discourse over the norms which would govern society in the Arab world.[3] And here he has much to offer. The empirical record shows a remarkable strain of symbolic politics, especially in Nasserite Egypt and Hashemite Jordan, but throughout the Arab world. In some ways, this was cynical manipulation.[4] The leaders of Arab states used what Barnett calls "Arabism" to aid in their own power –

[1] Barnett, Michael N., *Dialogues in Arab Politics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998) 1; and Walt, Stephen M., *The Origins of Alliances* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1987).
[2] Barnett notes the lack of arms racing and military alliances among Arab states – Barnett 1-2.
[3] Barnett 5.
[4] Barnett however notes that this sort of manipulation is dangerous (Barnett 34)

being "more Arab" made a state more legitimate. To whom? To the community at large, but also to the domestic polity. None of these states was in the classical sense a democracy – all were semi-authoritarian at best, if not more autocratic. And yet leaders such as Nasser and King Hussein were responsible to their constituencies – if they were seen as illegitimate, they invited revolt. And in fact, it is possible that some of these leaders even internalized the norms – they practiced what they preached. Regardless, it is safe to say that some sort of normative framework has been very influential in Middle Eastern politics, if only as a legitimating tool.

However, even if there has been some normative framework, the question is still open as to which normative framework has been embraced by Arab states. Barnett focuses on "Arabism," what he considers a secular and statist ideology.[5] Is this the only normative framework that has operated in the Middle East? The sovereignty framework, a focus on Arab states as states first, has had an effect, according to Barnett. And there is an idea of "Middle Easternism" present in the Arab world. But what of Islam?

Barnett argues that Islam in fact has little impact on international relations in the same manner as Arabism. To him, it has an impact, but it is on the level of state-society relations rather than interstate relations – the domestic equivalent to Arabism on the international level.[6] However, I disagree. Islam has been used in an identical way to the way in which Arabism was used – as a legitimating device from a cultural toolkit, to use Barnett's terminology, in order to define the norms of the "Arab" community.[7] Islam functions therefore in the same manner as Arabism as a competing normative framework. Barnett argues that dialogues among Arab states have been critical; I agree with him, but

[5] Barnett 60.
[6] Barnett 23 – Islam versus secularism as equivalent to statism versus Arabism.

I believe it is unfair to limit this to the secular, statist argument of Arabism versus secularism. Just as states in the Middle East define themselves as states, or as Arab states, they also define themselves as Islamic states, and this has an effect not only on state-society relations, but on interstate relations. In short, the normative structure of Arab politics is comprised of sovereignty, Arabism and Islam, not merely the first two.

I therefore argue that Islam is a competing normative framework to Arabism in the dialogue among Arab states to define the regional order. It is a unique normative framework, different in many ways from Arabism. Because of this, it has had a different impact from Arabism. Barnett states that "Arabism rather than Islam became the language of protest and politics for many reasons, but chief among them was that Arab leaders found Arabism to be a better instrument for political survival."[8] This is a fair argument to make in the 1920s. The Ottoman Empire and the attached caliphate had collapsed, and there was no central religious authority. However, it is also fair to say, and Barnett acknowledges this, that Arabism became de-legitimated as the conflicts fought for "Arab" ideals – the wars with Israel and attempts at Arab unity – ended in disaster for the states involved. In addition, the fate of the peoples of the Arab world did not dramatically improve over the decades after independence. Arabism was an ideology of empty promises – therefore, Islam offered a better option, and some states, including those analyzed here, took that option.

Islam as an ideology is peculiar, and there are tradeoffs in adopting it as a normative framework. As a normative framework it first became popular after the discrediting of Arabism after 1967. It had an inherent credibility that Arabism lacked –

---

[7] Barnett 39.
[8] Barnett 60.

Islam has yet to be truly discredited in the eyes of the peoples of the Arab world as a normative framework. In addition, Islam has the remarkable asset of belief. The number of believing Muslims in the Arab world far outstrips the number of rabid Arab nationalists. This gives Islam as a normative framework a remarkable amount of power, more, in some respects, than any other "secular" norm. I disagree with Barnett's argument that Islam is not a rival norm to Arabism but operates on a different level – state-society rather than interstate. While it is true that Islam offers a different operating framework for particular states, it also has specific implications for international relations. Islam as a normative framework is all-inclusive, covering foreign relations as well as domestic. As much as Arabism was a dialogue among states as much as within them, Islam functions in the same manner.[9] Yet if this is the case, then why would states operating within an Islamic milieu choose to cooperate with the United States?[10] This does not follow from adherence to the norm, and I seek here to explain how and why it is that states ally with the United States, given prevailing normative frameworks.

There are three potential explanations as to why states would align with the United States. The first rejects the existence of Islam as a normative framework, or of any normative framework for that matter, and argues that the states of the Middle East choose to align with the United States purely based on security and *realpolitik* considerations. The second embraces the existence of this normative framework, argues that it has in fact been internalized by the leadership structure, and that therefore any alliances with the United States would come in such a manner as to bolster the normative

[9] Juergensmeyer, Mark, *The New Cold War? Religious Nationalism Confronts the Secular State* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993) 33: "From that perspective, religion, like secular nationalism, is the glue that holds together broad communities."

framework. Both of these explanations expect a synergy between the domestic and international environments that I find to be flawed. While I do not believe that Islam as a normative framework is fully internalized, it does play a major role in the symbolic politics of the Middle East – it is at least partially internalized by a large degree of the masses if not by the elites, and it therefore offers legitimacy to a regime in making its policy decisions. As such, states, I argue, will act in ways that maximize their power – allying with the United States – but will use rhetoric to place this alliance within an Islamic context. This can be seen in the context of a two-step game, where on the one level the international environment is governed by neorealist security concerns, but on the other level domestic factions must be appeased by appeals to Islam. The leaders will in fact manipulate the normative framework by coercing norm entrepreneurs to interpret the framework in their favor. The level of coercion or acceptance will then be a function of the relative internalization of Islam as a norm – states whose leaders have not internalized the norm to the same degree as others will require a greater deal of coercion in order to legitimate what is a violation of the framework on the international level. This is an imperfect strategy, as Islamic opposition movements in the states of the Middle East remain strong, but their persistence demonstrates the importance of this normative framework.

What are the implications of this research? First, if it is true that Islam is a competing normative framework to Arabism, and has in fact supplanted it as I believe it has, then this has policy implications for the rest of the world. If states are socialized to operate in an Islamic framework, then understanding their actions should follow from a

[10] This is similar to the question of why states would choose in an Arabism environment to ally with the United States – Barnett 17-18.

closer inspection of Islam than may have been previously offered. In addition, this provides a boost to constructivist scholarship from a somewhat unexpected avenue. Islam's power is not constructed in the same sense as a secular normative framework like Arabism. It is manipulated to be sure, and some scholars might even argue that it is an entirely artificial construct. But to those believing in Islam – and in the Arab world, they are countless – it is not constructed, but rather divinely inspired. This gives Islam a power as a normative framework that manmade constructs lack, at least when there is a level of belief as seen in the Arab world. There is little analysis of religion as a norm in international politics, and that analysis which is done, such as that by Philpott, tends to focus on the secularizing impact of religious change, such as the Protestant Reformation.[11] On the other hand, this offers a different sort of normative change – a move in some ways away from secularism toward a different brand of politics. If in fact Islam has a special impact, this may signal a rich vein of research in international politics, as Islam is not the only religion with universalist tendencies and an array of "true believers."

In examining my arguments on the power of Islam as a norm, I will use two case studies. I will examine the impact of Islam in Egypt and Saudi Arabia, starting in the 1960s when Barnett argues that Arabism was strongest, and moving to the present day. This is a focus on Sunni Islam rather than Shiite Islam, although Shiite Islam has in fact had an even greater political impact, as evidenced by the rise of the Islamic Republic of Iran and its actions in the world community. I believe that both cases show the importance of the legitimizing power of Islam, as well as the costs of using it as a

[11] Philpott, Daniel, "The Religious Roots of Modern International Relations," *World Politics* 52:2 (2000) 206-245.

normative framework. In both cases, there was deviation from the normative framework, as well as attempts to reinterpret the framework to explain said deviations. The Sadat regime as well as the Mubarak presidency in Egypt has used Islam, and Barnett even recognizes that Saudi Arabia has always used an Islamic framework to define itself.[12] However, both states had to make decisions, involving their relations with the United States, which could be seen as a deviation from the Islamic normative framework as that framework was interpreted by the Arab world. I believe that these deviations are explained by my argument of incomplete internalization, as the rhetoric of leaders shows.

Islam as norm – construction on a foundation

When we speak of Islam as a normative framework, what is meant? Islam is an interesting case because of its unique nature as a norm based around a universalist religion. Islam is also a way of life as much as it is a religion – unlike many "mainstream" forms of Western Christianity, it covers everything from daily life to political governance. It therefore has special power as an ordering framework for a state, or for regional governance.

Islam does have implications for interstate relations as much as Arabism does. One of the elements of Arabism, according to Barnett, is unity[13] – Islam has the same idea in the concept of *umma*, the Islamic world which must be brought together.[14] In addition, the concept of *jihad*, so controversial in contemporary discourse, does have a

[12] Barnett 23.
[13] Barnett 56.
[14] Recently this has evolved in the same way that Arab unity evolved into Arab nationalism. Juergensmeyer 47: "Even though this yearning for a single Islamic nation runs deep in Muslim consciousness, most Muslim activists seem happy to settle for an Islamic nationalism that is limited to the particular countries in which they reside."

historical relevance as a concept of "holy war."[15] But the implications for interstate relations do not merely include those in the Quran.

It is true that Islam as a normative framework derives much of its power from the Quran and from the shared history of the Muslim peoples. However, this history is dynamic, and can be manipulated.[16] For example, *jihad* can be interpreted however leaders wish it to be interpreted. Being "properly Muslim" can be taken to mean everything from nuclear self-sufficiency to the rejection of ties with the West to conflict with the state of Israel – in the case of the Arab-Israeli conflict, reinforced by the presence of Islamic holy sites in Jerusalem. While it is true that Islam is less dynamic than the concept of Arabism because of its roots in the Quran, it can be malleable. In part this is because there is no central religious leadership in Islam.[17] Unlike Roman Catholicism, for example, Sunni Islam has no central leadership figure – there is no pope. There are schools of interpretation, but these can be manipulated. However, because there is no central authority – no alternative power base – there is also no central authority to be coopted by a state. Islamic opposition has proven virulent over recent decades, especially given that movements often try to force leaders to be "more Muslim." Yet at the same time, this is true of Arabism as well – the Arab street and more radical regimes were often pushing leaders such as King Hussein, Barnett describes, to be "more Arab," to further conform to the Arabist normative framework.[18]

---

[15] History such as the Crusades, and just as importantly, the term *jihad* has been used in contemporary discourse to mean holy war by leaders of states. For the modern relevance of the Crusades, see Maalouf, Amin, *The Crusades through Arab Eyes* (New York: Schocken Books, 1994) 265-266.

[16] Esposito, John L., *Islam and Politics*, 4th ed. (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1998) 320: "There was and is no single, agreed-upon model of an Islamic state."

[17] Juergensmeyer 58: "Sunni Muslims have neither the theological nor the organizational connection to politics that Shiites do."

[18] Barnett 126: "Jordan's Arab credentials [as of 1956] remained suspect so long as it remained allied with the British."

Islam therefore has particular costs and benefits as a normative framework which must be taken into account before its adoption. The primary benefit is legitimacy. To believers, Islam is not an artificial framework. Becoming an "Islamic state" conveys a legitimacy lacking in Arabism.[19] In addition, as mentioned earlier, Islam has not been damaged in the same way that Arabism has been. Therefore, adoption of Islamic norms and that framework has a particular power. However, the primary cost is what might be called "being handcuffed." Once Islam has been invoked, it is easy to criticize a leader for being "insufficiently Muslim." This is true of any norm, but it is especially costly with Islam. Because of its power, it can backfire – as happened in Egypt. There, as will be discussed later, Sadat was seen as being "a Muslim turncoat,"[20] and in the end was assassinated. Then why would states choose to adopt Islam as a normative framework?

Barnett states that Arab states "leaned heavily on Arab nationalism to legitimate their rule and justify their actions and generally honored the norms of Arabism because they desired the social approval and symbolic capital that came from being identified by their societies as Arab leaders in good standing."[21] This may in fact be true, and it may also be true of Islam – that Arab leaders used Islam because of the accrued benefits. However, it fails to address the deep socialization of Islam within the masses of these societies – the true believer complex.[22] In some ways, Islam as a normative framework is a deeper constructivist issue than Arabism – at least in Barnett's account, Arabism is very much instrumental. However, Islam, at least for the masses if not also for the elites, is

[19] Esposito 320-321: "Moreover, Islam has remained a primary principle of social cohesion and identity in spite of its loss of power and autonomy occasioned by colonialism and the Western secular path followed by most Muslim governments. Its continued presence among the vast majority of Muslims explains the continued appeal to and acceptance by many Muslims of "Islamic" politics."
[20] Juergensmeyer 37.
[21] Barnett 25-26.
[22] Esposito 321.

not merely an instrumental effect. It is deeply cherished and believed, and this has a major impact on both the power of Islam and why it would be used as a normative framework.[23]

The adoption of Islam as a normative framework

States in the Middle East have used symbolic politics in order to further their ends. This could be labeled a "soft rationalist" argument – leaders may not be socialized, but at the very least, they use ideology and normative frameworks to further their agendas.[24] Have states and their leaders acted for self-interested reasons when they have worked in an Islamic framework? Barnett in some ways argues that this Arabism was present at the creation, that it was an element in a rich variety of identities in the Middle East of the early 20th century which was chosen as a framework because of the particular benefits it demonstrated.[25] I agree that the benefits here were clear. In fact, these new states needed some form of legitimacy – without it, the states might not have survived. The history of the 20th century Middle East was one of Western involvement and artificial state creation out of an Ottoman Empire fragmenting by the beginning of the century. As such, these states, if they were to survive, needed something to bind them together. Religion was problematic because there was no religious authority to whom to appeal – if this had existed, then perhaps Islam would have emerged rather than a secularist ideology in order to appeal to the masses. But a secularist ideology did emerge and was used.

---

[23] Juergensmeyer 18: "Secular nationalism responds to the same needs for collective identity, ultimate loyalty, and moral authority that religion has traditionally responded to"; see also Esposito 320.
[24] Finnemore, Martha, and Kathryn Sikkink, "International Norm Dynamics and Political Change," *International Organization* 52:4 (Autumn 1998) 903, 906 on legitimation.
[25] Barnett 60.

Arabism became an element of the political discourse of the Middle East because it was useful. Barnett links it to "wider sociopolitical forces,"[26] meaning that nationalism – and specifically Arab nationalism – had a particular power with the elites and masses of Arab states. The empirical evidence supports this – riots in support of Nasserism, the pressures toward Arabism in many states in the Middle East, etc. This was true of Islam as well. Because of its hold on the populaces, Islam could be used by leaders as a potent tool. In the "cultural toolkit" described by Barnett, it was the equivalent of a blowtorch – potentially catastrophic, but also potentially very powerful.

So when did Islam become this powerful tool? To Barnett, the debates over what should constitute the Arab world come at "dialogues," which emerge in times of crisis. In other words, some sort of exogenous shock drives the debate toward a new consensus. Assuming that this mechanism of change is accurate, then the shock which impelled a search for new normative frameworks was the Six Day War of 1967.[27] Before this conflict Nasser had enjoyed a remarkable string of victories. Militarily defeated in the 1956 Suez war he came out of the crisis better off than he was at the outset, and the foundation of the United Arab Republic and increased Soviet aid to Egypt made the leader of the Arabist community more and more powerful. Yet the Six-Day War changed all of this. Israel decisively defeated its enemies and seized vast swaths of territory. Arabism had not worked in ameliorating the lives of average Arabs, and it had not completed the missions its leaders had set out for themselves. A search had to begin for other options.

[26] Barnett 60.
[27] Esposito 159.

However, I do not know if I entirely agree with this idea of "dialogues" forcing debate. I argue that instead, these legitimating ideas are constantly under stress and tested against other rival ideologies and normative frameworks. Arabism was in competition with other ideas such as the sovereignty norm and Islam. During the period of the 1950s, the tests were ongoing but Arabism continued to succeed. However, when Arabism failed the search turned to other options. As such, the normative framework of states is in a constant state of tension, potentially replaced by another legitimating idea which has yet to be tried and found wanting. Since this is at its heart an instrumental logic, the power of a normative framework will be based on its success in sustaining leaders' power. As such, Arabism was effective, albeit tested, until 1967. Islam, on the other hand, succeeded in 1973, which helps to explain why it remains powerful. And the assassination of Sadat in 1981 can be seen in some regards as a watchword to those who would consider breaking away from Islam, giving it more power as a legitimating ideology.

I argue that Islam became a key component of the normative debate because of the failure of Arabism – but what does this mean? It means that states now consider their Islamic identity as much as they do their sovereign identity or their Arab identity, if not more so. Leaders are engaged in the "marketplace of ideas," searching for legitimating ideologies. When they find one, they will adopt it.[28] They will act in accordance with this normative framework when it benefits them, and when they do not, they will use rhetoric to justify their actions within it.

[28] This can be compared to Snyder's analysis of the search for nationalist myths in the marketplace of ideas. Leaders in Middle Eastern countries are similar to nationalist politicians, then, searching for an archetype after which to pattern oneself – Westernizer, Arabist, Islamist, secularist, and so on. See Snyder, Jack Lewis, *From Voting To Violence*, (New York: W. W. Norton, 2000) 57.

This instrumental logic implies that there is no socialization occurring, no internalization of these norms. This is not entirely true. As time progresses, and leaders continue to legitimate their rule through appeals to a particular normative framework, those appeals create a precedent which the leader is obliged to acknowledge. Given that we are dealing with autocracies here, the sorts of domestic political costs may be more manageable than in a democracy, but over time the credibility of the leadership becomes bound up in that particular normative framework. Deviations become more difficult to explain as the leadership attempts to build a credible pattern of adherence to the norm in order to maintain legitimacy. These patterns may become ingrained over time, at which point we can say that socialization has occurred.[29] However, I argue that this takes a remarkable amount of time to even move beyond the initial stages of norm acceptance, if ever.

In the instrumental use of Islam as a normative framework, an element of agency exists as well. Islam is not merely a normative framework created *ex nihilo*. While Sunni Islam lacks the hierarchical structure of some other religions such as Roman Catholicism, the clerical class serves as a set of norms entrepreneurs who set the terms of debate in what it means to be Muslim.[30] The problem with the lack of a formalized hierarchy like in other religions is that these norms entrepreneurs are not supreme, and can overrule each other. There is a base for the framework – the Quran – from which the normative framework is supposed to flow. However, interpretations of what is in the Quran vary. Therefore, the normative framework can in fact be influenced through the cooption or

[29] Wendt, Alexander, *Social Theory of International Politics*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999) 310-311: "As cultural practices get routinized in the form of habits they get pushed into the shared cognitive background, becoming taken for granted rather than objects of calculation. Other things being

coercion of norms entrepreneurs. However, since there is no supreme entrepreneur, alternative interpretations proliferate. This helps to explain why Islam can serve simultaneously as a legitimating factor for a government and for an opposition movement.

The role of "The West"

While there is confusion over much of what "being Muslim" constitutes, one commonly held part of the Islamic normative framework is a stance of opposition against the United States and "the West." This opposition follows from specific policy decisions adopted by the US, as well as the role the United States has played in the world in recent decades.

Islam is tied closely to the Arab-Israeli conflict, although it was not before 1967. After the Six-Day War, Israeli control of East Jerusalem and the al-Aqsa mosque, third holiest site in Islam after the holy cities of Mecca and Medina, added a significant religious dimension to the ongoing conflict. Tied to this is American support for Israel. Before 1967, the United States had a role to play in the Middle East as honest broker. American interests in the Middle East centered on oil, as evidenced by the fact that before the 1960s, Israel was procuring arms from Czechoslovakia and France rather than the US. By the time of the Six-Day War, the US was more supportive of Israel, but not as closely tied as it would be when it airlifted supplies during the 1973 Yom Kippur War, triggering an Arab oil boycott.

Continued American support of Israel has been a major reason why it has been deemed illegitimate by Muslim norm entrepreneurs. However, it is not the only reason.

---

equal, therefore, the longer a practice has been in existence the deeper it will be embedded in the individual and collective consciousness."

American support of "corrupt" and secular regimes in the Middle East has been criticized, as has the "perverting" influence of American culture[31]. Islam is a reaction against secularism[32], and the United States is presented as the apotheosis of secular culture. This is not unique to criticism of the US in the Muslim world, but it happens to be one way in which Islam sets itself in opposition to the US. Another way is religious – while the Quran does not discriminate against Christians, the legacy of the Crusades still rings clear in the minds of Muslims, and the United States as a "Christian state" is seen as on a collision course by some with the Muslim world. This is only magnified when statements are made such as that by President Bush that the war on terrorism coming after September 11, 2001 was a "crusade."[33]

Finally, the United States is often put into opposition with Islam because it is the only dominant state in the international system today. Before 1991, however, the international system was bipolar rather than unipolar. The Arab identity allowed states to ally with the Soviet Union, but Islam did not. In this respect, it is possible to justify some of the alliances that were made during the Cold War on the part of Islamic states by saying that they were allied against the Soviet Union. However, in neither of the cases examined herein was the threat made against the Islamic state in question made by a state backed by the Soviet Union. It is true that Egypt expelled Soviet advisors before the 1973 war, but it did not at that time turn immediately to the United States, nor did it accept Israel. And Iraq was backed by the United States in the 1980s, not by the Soviet

---

[30] Finnemore and Sikkink 895 on norms entrepreneurs.
[31] Juergensmeyer 22: "To some religious nationalists' way of thinking, there is a global conspiracy against religion, orchestrated by the United States. For this reason virtually anything the United States does that involves non-Western societies, even when its stated intentions are positive, is viewed as part of a plot to destroy or control them."
[32] Barnett 23.
[33] Maalouf 265-266 on the current relevance of the Crusade metaphor.

Union, against Iran. Therefore these alliance structures do not fit into the Cold War bipolar relationship, although other relationships such as Saudi-American cooperation with respect to the Afghan mujahaddin fit more into this paradigm.

Hypothesis: Islam as "Legitimating Tool": Two-level game

Islam in the Middle East has proven a powerful normative framework, but has not been fully internalized. States still act to maximize their security in the international environment, which is a zero-sum security game. As such, an outside power such as the United States will serve to balance against a potential regional rival. This is what Walt describes as the predominant form of coalition formation – "balancing behavior is far more common than bandwagoning behavior… …[compared to the superpowers] less capable states within a given region, such as the Middle East, seek allies primarily to balance against those who are close by."[34]

Given this, there is no difference from Walt's analysis. And to be sure, in the international arena, I argue that states make their decisions based on security concerns, especially when proximate security concerns arise – as did in Egypt and Saudi Arabia. However, the problem with the realist analysis of Middle Eastern alliances is that it stops here.[35] Even Barnett argues that in the wake of the 1967 war, Arabism began to be replaced by statism.[36] However, this ignores the rise of Islam as a rival and exceedingly powerful norm in the Middle East, something that Barnett alludes to briefly but then

[34] Walt 161.
[35] Walt 266: "Ideological solidarity is less important than external threats as a cause of alliances."
[36] Barnett 162-163,where he blames this move on the rise of the conservative Gulf states and by "the growth of territorial nationalism and the growing identification of citizens with their states."

passes over.[37] In fact, the existence of any legitimating rhetoric reinforces the importance of the particular norm, even if the actor argues against it.[38] If there is any legitimating rhetoric other than that of costs and benefits – that is, if there is an appeal to ideational rather than material factors – then we can evaluate that a norm is present. Here, we look for legitimating rhetoric reflecting Islam, to signal that this is the norm to which the populace adheres. However, I here use legitimation in an instrumental sense rather than a socialized sense, where leaders see a need to justify their actions so as to stay in power rather than so as to foster a sense of "belonging." It is true that this legitimation can come from the international community,[39] but here it is domestic in nature.

This hypothesis argues that decisions to join into alliances with other states, such as the United States, occur in the frame of a two-level game.[40] The first level, labeled by Putnam as Level I, is the international environment. Here leaders of Middle Eastern states bargain with the leaders of the US for the creation of alliances.[41] The second level is what is called the ratification level. Here, the domestic populace must approve or disapprove of the alliance, and the leadership must "sell" the negotiation to the people.[42] It is here that legitimating rhetoric comes into play, and we see appeals to Islam as a

---

[37] Barnett 162: "For others the radicals were now on trial and the jury was Islam: the road to ruin had been paved by secularism, because Arab-Islamic societies had turned their backs on tradition and religion. Islamist movements, on the defensive in the region since the imposition of the mandate system, began to reassert themselves in political life." Regrettably, Barnett does not come back to this, moving instead to his statist milieu.

[38] Finnemore and Sikkink 892 – using the example of a norm against the use of land mines, they state, "If not for the norm, there would be no need to mention, explain, or justify the use of mines in Korea at all."

[39] Finnemore and Sikkink 903.

[40] Putnam, Robert D, "Diplomacy and Domestic Politics: The Logic of Two-Level Games," *International Organization* 42:3 (Summer 1998) 427-460. This is also a framework used for normative penetration by Finnemore and Sikkink (893).

[41] To use Putnam's terms, "at the international level, national governments seek to maximize their own ability to satisfy domestic pressures, while minimizing the adverse consequences of foreign developments." (434)

[42] Putnam 434: "Moves that are rational for a player at one board [such as making an alliance – *my parenthesis*] may be impolitic for that player at the other board."

normative framework to justify the alliance. However, these appeals may not mesh with the normative framework – since we examine alliances with the United States here, and we have already seen that the US is considered an enemy to Islam, how is this reconciled?

The mechanism here by which legitimation is found is the elite manipulation of the masses. Snyder details this when he discusses the use of nationalist rhetoric in democratizing states.[43] Snyder states that to overcome barriers to collective action, or to "promote popular loyalty while still containing popular demands,"[44] that elites use institutions and ideas. The idea has already been granted – Islam. The institution is also in place. While there is no hierarchy in Islam, there is a group of norms entrepreneurs – the clerical class – manipulated in order to provide cover for the regime's actions. These norm entrepreneurs are the critical element in the first stage of norm influence, but since they function during the early stages of a norm's existence as a norm, any manipulation of them should have a greater impact than post-internalization. In addition, this class of norms entrepreneurs is backed by an Islamic establishment providing an "organizational platform."[45] Snyder states that democratizing states favor nationalism over moderation because "elites who benefit from nationalism often retain partial control over powerful governmental, economic, and media resources."[46] This control prevents substantial public debate on the issues,[47] and barring such debate, the official viewpoint gains more power. Given that Snyder's analysis focuses on emerging democracies, these factors

[43] Snyder 45-91.
[44] Snyder 47.
[45] Finnemore and Sikkink 899. See also Esposito 320 on institutions managed by the ulema.
[46] Snyder 54.
[47] Snyder 55-56, where he states: "They [nationalist elites] can often hijack the mass media, just as they can manipulate elections, rig the courts, and corrupt the state bureaucracy." This is dependent on the level of control over information.

should in fact be magnified for autocracies, whose leaders possess even greater control of the means of mass communication. In addition, it is easier to coerce the clerical class in an autocracy than in a democracy, where public pressure could lead to the fall of a regime. If the clerical class can be coerced or convinced that it is in their best interests to support the state violation of the Islamic normative framework, then this cover can lead to a reconciling of the bargaining space between the two levels, and a solution which satisfies both the security and legitimacy needs of the Middle Eastern state.

The level of coercion necessary to convince norms entrepreneurs to comply with the interpretation of the Islamic framework desired by the leadership of a Muslim state is a function of the level of internalization of that norm in the state.[48] The more internalized the norm is, the less necessary coercion will be, because the leadership will be acting more in line with the norm itself, and seeing this, the clerical class and other norms entrepreneurs will require less coercion to agree with that leadership. Here we will look at situations of partial internalization, where there is a disconnect between the norm and the actions of the state. Situations of zero or full internalization will comprise my alternative hypotheses – here we will examine cases of coerced or self-interested internalization, both of which have materialist rationales.

Therefore, in this hypothesis, the decision to form an alliance with the United States will be a function of the threat faced by the state, but the form of legitimation will be a function of the level of internalization. In other words, the form of the alliance, how it is put forward to the people, will be a function of both the threat, making the alliance necessary; and the level of internalization which will determine the manner in which the government goes about procuring compliance with its interpretation of the norm.

Hypothesis: Alliance based on threat

An alternative explanation as to why states in the Middle East ally with outside powers like the United States is one based on power politics – that the decision to ally with an outside power is premised on the norm of sovereignty and the separate, statist identity of various Middle Eastern states. This follows Barnett's argument that after the 1967 war, Arabism was discredited in favor of a statist identity for Arab states,[49] as well as the arguments laid out by Walt. Therefore, states will ally when there is a threat, or benefits to be accrued, and will decide to ally based solely on a rationalist calculation of costs and benefits.

Alliance will therefore be premised on a need to maximize security, be that from an internal or from an external threat. The United States represents in this model a major power, no different from any other state in the international system save in terms of its capabilities. As such, alliance with the United States is no different from alliance with any other power except that alliance with the United States should render more benefits because of the power brought to bear.[50]

This does not mean that states will immediately choose to ally with the United States. While bandwagoning is a feature of many unipolar international systems, the primary identity of these states is as sovereign actors, and they will not wish to sacrifice this sovereignty. Alliance therefore comes, as in the other theoretical explanations here, as a last resort.[51] However, it is a calculation based on costs and benefits rather than

---

[48] On levels of internalization (coercion, self-interest, and legitimacy), see Wendt 310.
[49] Barnett 165-181 on Khartoum and the "consecration of sovereignty."
[50] Walt 199: "If ideological solidarity were the most important determinant of alignment, the United States would have few friends in the Middle East… …As with the Soviet Union, ideological solidarity between the United States and its Middle East allies is confined largely to issues of foreign policy," but even this is not necessarily true, as relations with Israel demonstrate.
[51] Walt 148.

symbolic politics, based on the potential security benefits – strategic and economic – that would result from an alliance.

To use the model of a two-level game presented above, this hypothesis posits zero internalization of the Islamic norm. As such, there is no coercion of the clerical class because they are irrelevant – they are no longer norms entrepreneurs providing legitimacy to the regime, and are simply religious figures like those in a Western, secular state, with no realizable aspirations to state power.[52] Because here I am dealing with a unitary process where the state makes decisions based solely on the international environment, there is no need to "sell" the alliance to the domestic population because they are assumed, in the absence of a norm governing their actions, to be rational utility maximizers who will see the benefits of an alliance rather than the costs. Since this is meant to be a calculus of state benefit rather than personal benefit, the threats faced by a state should drive the population to support the alliance – but even if they do not, since the legitimacy of the leadership does not derive from a norm, there is no need for norm enforcement.

In this theory, the independent variable has nothing to do with identity, but is simply the level of threat faced by the Middle Eastern state. That level of threat will then determine the sort of alliance with the United States, the dependent variable. As mentioned earlier, causation follows here from the level of threat perceived, rather than from any other factor.

Any rhetoric which would be used here – and because of the materialist basis of this argument, rhetoric is relatively unimportant – would focus on the sovereignty of the state. Arguments for alliance would be couched in terms of maintaining sovereignty

more than any other factor. Analysis of the rhetoric at the time of the decision to ally should reflect these concerns, as a signal of the primary concern of the leadership, at least from a legitimacy perspective.

The only time here where an alliance will be sought is when sovereignty is threatened. If it is not, then alliances will not emerge. In addition, alliances will not be premised on grounds other than those of national interest. A problem with this theory is that it assumes that states act solely on the basis of maximizing security, and that they neglect more "symbolic" forms of politics. Evidence does exist to show that in the Middle East, states do act based on symbols, but this depends on the empirical evidence at hand.

Hypothesis: Internalized Islam and alliance decisions

Another alternative explanation gives in fact more power to the normative framework than the "incomplete internalization" hypothesis detailed above. Here, decisions for alliance are in fact subsumed within a deep internalization of the normative framework. With regards to Islam, alliance with the United States would in fact result from a change in the framework, rather than a deviation from it. If the norm were not to change, I argue that in fact states would choose not to ally with the United States.

Norms can be dynamic, and Islam as a normative framework is no exception to this. In fact, the "fuzziness" of definition in what it means to be Muslim and to "act Muslim" as a leader gives a great deal of flexibility to the normative framework, and

[52] Wendt's stages of internalization therefore do not apply with respect to the Islamic normative framework.

allows it to shift. This shift may or may not be driven by material concerns, but will be organic; there is no coercion of norms entrepreneurs in this case.[53]

How, then, would the norm change? A change in the external environment could prompt this. For example, while there is a baseline for Islam as a normative framework – the Quran – this is open to interpretation, and as the international environment changes, the role for these states to play in that international community changes as well. In the past Islamism rejected even nationalism as an acceptable belief, calling for the union of all Muslims in one state – the *umma*. However, this belief has evolved, as one Islamist stated, from one state to a "League of Nations."[54] The acceptability of alliance with an outside power like the United States could change as well. If the US were to change its policy *vis a vis* the Israeli-Palestinian conflict to one perceived in the Arab world as a form of "honest broker," the potential exists for a shift in the view of the Islamic world toward the US.[55]

Again referring to the above two-level framework, this is a scenario where in fact there is full internalization of the norm by the elites as well as the masses in the state. There is no need for a two-level game because whichever decision would be reached on the international level is sure to be ratified by the socialized masses, assuming that the leader is properly socialized into being guided by the norm into "appropriate" behavior. Given this socialization, and the existence of a third-degree norm, then we would in fact

[53] Here we see the third stage of Wendtian internalization – "legitimacy," involving "a shared *understanding* about 'how things are done.'" Wendt 268.
[54] Esposito 340 quoting Muhammad Iqbal: "God is slowly bringing home to us the truth that Islam is neither Nationalism nor Imperialism but a League of Nations which recognize artificial boundaries and racial distinctions of reference and not for restricting the social horizon of its members."
[55] Note that this is a shift in the eyes of the Muslim world – even if the United States is acting as an honest broker, if it is not perceived as doing so, it has no merit in terms of shifting this normative framework. On the other hand, one can argue that the only way in which the US could be perceived as an honest broker would be a change in the normative framework, rendering this a "chicken and egg" question.

expect to see states refusing to make alliances with the United States, even when faced with serious threats to their security, if that alliance would remain a violation of the normative framework. State death becomes preferable to deviation.

It is difficult to measure shifts in normative frameworks, but with this theoretical premise, the independent variable would be the adoption of Islam as a normative framework, and the dependent variable would be the choice of an alliance with the United States. Unlike in the legitimating hypothesis, however, there would be agreement on such an alliance as being acceptable and appropriate within the normative framework. No coercion would be applied to norms entrepreneurs because such an alliance would "seem appropriate." Analysis of the rhetoric on the part of leaders as well as norms entrepreneurs, and examination of public reaction to such an alliance, would demonstrate the change in the "acceptance" of an alliance.

By this logic, if the norm does not change, then no alliance would occur, because leaders here have fully internalized the Islamic framework for state governance. Or if a state chose to, it would be punished, on the basis of that violation, by other states adhering to the norm as well as by internal elites also socialized to believe in the norm. Calculations of power politics will thus be secondary to the logic of appropriateness provided by the Islamic normative framework.

The problem with this potential hypothesis is that it submerges security calculations within this normative framework, assuming that identity politics are in fact primary, when they give no solution to the security dilemma whatsoever, and in fact ignore it. While there is something to be said for security being a function of legitimacy, especially in states where the rule of the leadership is a function of authoritarian control,

subsuming all state actions to the rule of a normative framework other than that of sovereignty seems to go against a rational calculation of costs and benefits. At the same time, one can argue that "rational" calculus and a defense of sovereignty is merely a defense of a different normative framework deeply socialized into most international actors. The empirics should show whether or not this deep internalization has occurred with respect to Islam as a normative framework.

Egypt: A religious alternative to Nasserism and Arabism

Before the 1967 Six Day War, Egypt's General Gamel Abdel Nasser was the primary norm entrepreneur of Arabism as described by Barnett.[56] His failure, and the failure of the norm to solidify the Arab coalition arrayed against Israel in 1967, signaled the failure of Arabism as a norm to govern the politics of the Middle East. Nasser died three years later, and his successor, Anwar Sadat, chose a different normative framework within which to wrap himself: Islam.

Sadat called himself "the Believer-President," and cultivated a reputation for piety.[57] The 1973 Yom Kippur War, known significantly in Egypt as the Ramadan War, was fought after Sadat expelled the Soviet advisors from Egyptian soil.[58] Sadat oversaw a remarkable Islamization of Egypt, liberalizing religious laws and allowing more religious dissent than his predecessor had seen fit to authorize. Yet Sadat also chose to embrace the United States and to make peace with Israel. Was this entirely a material maneuver, based on threats posed to Egypt by her neighbors? Sadat was a shrewd

[56] Barnett 10.
[57] Esposito 236.
[58] This can be seen as a further repudiation of Arabism in that Arabism and Arab socialism were closely tied to relations with the USSR. On the "Islamic" impact of the 1973 war, see Esposito 160.

student of power politics in the Middle East, and saw the United States as far more powerful than the Soviet Union. He also knew that Egypt's economic situation was such that American economic support would be irreplaceable, and he knew that regaining the Sinai would be nigh impossible without support from some outside party – the 1973 war proved that.[59] Given all this, it is relatively unsurprising that he chose to make peace with Israel, especially under the auspices of the US. The involvement of the Carter Administration helped bridge the credibility gap which existed between two states never having negotiated with each other in the past.

As such, Sadat violated the normative framework of Islam which he had embraced upon ascending to the presidency. This goes against the "deep internalization" hypothesis proposed earlier, given that the normative framework did not change as might have been predicted if Sadat were a "true believer." Of the two rationalist hypotheses, however, the "threat-based alliance" argument is somewhat flawed. Israel still posed a substantial threat to Egypt, and had dealt it serious losses in the 1973 war. The United States was a necessary partner to regain the Sinai – having already rejected the Soviets, there was no other major power in the international system available to aid Egypt. There was not, however, a clear and present danger to Egyptian security looming on the horizon. Egyptian sovereignty, save that over the Sinai, was not threatened.

And more importantly, the legitimating rhetoric used by Sadat was not merely that of a sovereign state. Rather, he used Islamic rhetoric to justify his peace treaty with Israel – surprising, given that this goes against nearly all that has been discussed herein

[59] Barnett 190 on the importance of regaining the Sinai, although he places this within an Arab context.

on Israel's relations with those socialized into the Islamic normative framework.[60] The faculty of al Azhar University, the primary source of religious instruction in Egypt and as such a critical norm entrepreneur, issued a *fatwa* endorsing the peace treaty and the reversion of the Sinai to Egyptian sovereignty.[61] Sadat followed up on the peace treaty with a decision to liberalize Muslim family law, but had the rector of al-Azhar endorse this action as appropriate.[62] These actions would not be taken if he were primarily concerned with sovereignty – rather, they are hallmarks of a leader attempting to legitimate his violations of a normative framework by using that normative framework, coercing norms entrepreneurs to endorse his shifts in the frame.

This is unsurprising given that Egypt had long been a secular state, or at best "Muslim" rather than "Islamic."[63] Having drifted away from the Ottomans and coming under British protection by the 1880s, the kingdom which was overthrown by the Free Officers was secular, and Nasser's regime was also secular-based, although he used some Islamic symbols to attempt to co-opt the same sort of legitimacy Sadat would seek.[64] The use of Islam as a normative framework, albeit powerful due to mass socialization and internalization of the norm, was relatively new for the elites. This calls for relatively weak internalization, which according to the theory proposed above would yield a shift

[60] An example of the Islamic rhetoric used – his trip to Jerusalem fell on the Muslim holiday *Eid*, which Eilts notes "would have great dramatic effect on the Arab world." The same can be said of the Muslim world, especially given that his trip was designed to coincide with a holy day – something for which he was criticized later. Alterman, Jon B., ed., *Sadat and his Legacy: Egypt and the World, 1977-1997*, (Washington, DC: Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 1998) 16. Another example was his decision to pray at the al-Aqsa mosque, for which he was criticized since it was "under the control of infidels." Lippman, Thomas W., *Egypt After Nasser: Sadat, peace, and the mirage of prosperity*, (New York: Paragon House, 1989) 250.
[61] Esposito 243. "The criticism of the government was not lessened by al-Azhar's endorsement of Sadat's peace initiation. Rather in confirmed the belief that the religious establishment had become a puppet of the regime."
[62] Esposito 244.
[63] Esposito 131-132.
[64] Juergensmeyer 36.

away from the normative framework to an alliance with the United States over relatively small issues. In other words, it should not take a great deal of provocation, nor a clear and present danger to Egyptian sovereignty, for alliance with the United States to become an attractive proposition. And any sort of backing from norms entrepreneurs, given the level of internalization in Egypt, should be coerced if not grudgingly offered. Egypt found itself in the 1970s with a first-level internalization of the Islamic norm – it existed and was recognized as such by the state, but adherence, at least to the state's version, had to be coerced. As for potential changes in the norm, the amount of protest from Islamic quarters of the peace treaty demonstrates that in fact there was no organic change in the norm. In fact, those Islamic institutions which supported Sadat in his moves toward "the West" were criticized as corrupt and "un-Islamic."[65]

Much of the criticism described above was internal, Muslim civil society protesting against a regime for a foreign policy decision. Yet one of the reasons why Islam is a powerful normative force in Middle Eastern politics, not merely Egyptian politics, is that it crosses borders. Egypt was condemned by all its Muslim and Arab neighbors for making peace.[66] Egypt had already abandoned the pan-Arab norm, and as a sovereign state it had the right to negotiate with whichever state it chose. As such, condemnation from Arab quarters must have been grounded in some sort of normative bias – here, the role of Jerusalem as third holiest city in Islam comes into play. While Islam may not have been the normative framework guiding policy in all the states which voiced opposition to Egypt – much of this opposition coming as states saw Egypt defect

[65] Esposito 244.
[66] Lippmann 250: "…He [Sadat] allowed Egypt to be drummed out of the worldwide fraternity of Muslim nations."

from the Khartoum Declaration – it did play a role in many of the international protests against Egypt's negotiations with Israel.

Sadat's decision to violate the Islamic normative framework would cost him his life, as he was assassinated by a member of Egyptian Islamic Jihad striking out a blow for Muslims. Yet Sadat's conscious decision to seek a *fatwa* justifying peace with Israel and his other policy changes demonstrates that he was not merely calculating the costs and benefits of alliance with the United States, but heavily engaged in the symbolic politics of the Middle East. In Egypt, given the fall of Arabism, this involved invocations of the Quran and appeals to Islam. It is true that Sadat made some moves toward secularism as well – yet this debate between the sovereign, statist identity of Egypt and its identity as an Islamic state reflected the debate in Nasserite Egypt between its identity as a state and its identity explicitly as an *Arab* state. As such, Islam had a power as a normative framework, even if Sadat chose to violate it, since he continued to appeal to it.

Saudi Arabia: Legitimacy through Islam

Arabia has a central place in the hearts of all Muslims, as the home to the two holiest sites in Islam, Mecca and Medina. Whoever controls those sites has a great deal of power within the Islamic world, as well as a great deal of responsibility to protect those sites and be a "legitimate Muslim ruler." Since the 1920s, the holy places, and most of the Arabian peninsula for that matter, has been controlled by the House of Saud.

Because of the Saudi royal family's acceptance of the Wahabbi strain of Sunni Islam, the rulers of Saudi Arabia have always been markedly conscious of the importance of Islam as a legitimating framework.[67] Of all the states in the Middle East, they come closest to a full internalization of the Islamic normative framework, given their history

and role as protector of the holy sites. And Saudi foreign and domestic policy have often been close to this idea of Islam as a norm governing rule.[68] The vast majority of Saudi foreign aid goes to Muslim states, and often has a substantial impact in changing policy to be "more Muslim."[69] The Saudis were the primary financiers of the mujahaddin war against the Soviets in Islam, labeled as a *jihad* against "godless Communism."

Yet the House of Saud has also been very calculating in its power politics. It happens to be the largest oil producer in the world, and has used that power to seek its foreign policy goals, including the spread of Islam.[70] In order to gain that wealth, it has worked in conjunction with the West, and in addition, the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait prompted the Saudis to invite American forces into their country to protect the Kingdom from Iraqi aggression.

How did the Saudis justify their actions? The Saudis did not act with a changing normative framework. In fact, the House of Saud has been often criticized for violations of Islamic law.[71] These differ from, for example, cooperation with the Americans in Afghanistan, where in fact Islam was being reinforced. It was possible in the past to justify alliance with the Americans as being in opposition to the Soviets, who posed an even graver threat to Islam. The Soviets, however, were minimally if at all involved in

---

[67] Esposito 106-107.
[68] Esposito 105: "The Saudis proudly affirm and their history and practice mirror an Islamic character."
[69] Dawisha, Adeed I., "Internal Values and External Threats: The Marking of Saudi Foreign Policy," *Orbis* 23:1 (1979) 139; Miglietta, John P., *American Alliance Policy in the Middle East, 1945-1992: Iran, Israel, and Saudi Arabia* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2002) 247.
[70] Dawisha 139, 141.
[71] More than anything else, this is a criticism of the alliance with the US. See Cordesman, Anthony H., *Saudi Arabia: Guarding the Desert Kingdom* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1997) 192 on the prepositioning of US forces in Saudi Arabia after the Gulf War; Miglietta 260; Freedman, Lawrence, and Ephraim Karsh, *The Gulf Conflict, 1990-1991* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993) 87, who imply that the Saudis had a responsibility to the Muslim world to invite the US in – "yet to settle for half-measures would leave it [the Kingdom] exposed to accusations of defiling Islam's holy places."

the 1990 Iraqi invasion of Kuwait. As such, alliance with the United States, or other violations of the Islamic normative framework, raise questions.

On the one hand, it is possible to paint the Saudis with a *realpolitik* brush. This would argue that they are interested in regime survival and economic gain, nothing more, and have used the United States to further that end. Yet this does not explain the other elements of Saudi foreign policy, especially the export of their particular branch of Islam worldwide, when this yields no tangible material benefits.[72] In addition, an analysis of the rhetoric behind Saudi decisions to work the US and to violate the Islamic normative framework demonstrates a greater concern with justification through Islam. In a separate case not involving the US but involving a potential violation of the Islamic normative framework - attacking the Great Mosque of Mecca when it was seized by rebels - the Saudis sought a *fatwa* to justify the legality, under Islamic law, of what they were about to do. Yet the *fatwa* issued did not condemn the rebels for heresy, a critical note.[73] As for the alliance with the United States since 1990, the Saudi royal family has couched it in terms of defense of the holy sites,[74] but this has led to extensive protest in the Muslim world.

As such, this fits the paradigm established by our theory of a state choosing to violate the Islamic normative framework, but seeking to justify those violations using the symbolic politics of Islam. However, it is important to note that in comparison to the Egypt case, Saudi Arabia was far more threatened by the Great Mosque crisis and the

---

[72] Dawisha 141.
[73] Miglietta 276.
[74] Rashid, Nasser Ibrahim, and Esber Ibrahim Shaheen, *Saudi Arabia and the Gulf War* (Joplin, MO: International Institute of Technology, Inc., 1992) 156, 158 – excerpts of statements by King Fahd describing how, among other things, "This is the power of God and it is not our power, the power of God Almighty who made these countries [including the US] respond to the call for help by the Kingdom of

Iraqi invasion of Kuwait. Both posed greater threats to security, internal with the former and external with the latter, than the aftermath of the 1973 Ramadan War for Sadat's Egypt. One can therefore argue that it took a greater threat to Saudi Arabia for them to seek the sort of alliance with the West that they sought, an alliance in fact closer than that of the Egyptians.[75] This is not merely a function of the threat posed by Saddam in 1990 – it is also a result of the deeper internalization of the Islamic normative framework among Saudi elites. If Islam had less of an impact in Saudi Arabia, a stronger bond to the West would have developed in Saudi Arabia before it in fact did. This internalization is a reflection of Wendt's argument that time yields deeper internalization.[76] However, it is also true that significant protest coalesced around the idea of American forces in Saudi Arabia.[77] As such, this was not an example of full internalization, but rather a legitimating rhetoric as in the case of Egypt.[78] The means of procuring said rhetoric were more benign than in Egypt because of the length of time of socialization.

The use of symbolic politics here refutes the argument that Saudi Arabia was in fact merely interested in power politics, but it does show that the Saudis violated the Islamic normative framework. As such, dissent should result, and in fact it did. Bin Laden among other Saudi dissidents has called for the overthrow of the Saudi regime and their replacement with a "truly Islamic regime." They have also repeatedly called for the

---

Saudi Arabia." (156) Within the same conversation he stated that foreign military forces would not remain (158).

[75] This was not to be a lasting military alliance, however; as the Saudis envisioned it, the US would leave after the end of the war. Rashid and Shaheen 158; Nyang, Sulayman, and Evan Hendricks, *A Line In the Sand* (P.T. Books, 1995) 173-4.

[76] Wendt 310-311.

[77] Juergensmeyer 49 and 22, which highlights the change to opposition by Muslim groups throughout the Middle East; Cordesman 192; Freedman and Karsh 363 (statement by Saddam using Islamic rhetoric).

[78] This is corroborated by Freedman and Karsh, who show during the discussions as to whether or not to insert American troops, that the decision was easier for the Saudis because of "the possibility of an *Islamic cover* [emphasis mine] to broaden the military support beyond the US." This is a materialist rather than ideational argument – especially using the term "cover."

removal of American troops from Saudi Arabia. And in fact the Saudis have maintained an uneasy balance. Significant factions within the royal family would prefer to see the US out of Saudi Arabia. However, on the other hand, with Saddam Hussein still in power in Iraq and a revolutionary Shiite regime in power in Iran, American military might protects the Saudi regime from very real external threats.

Policy implications

The conclusions reached here have some impact on the future of Arab-American relations in that they explain why some Middle Eastern regimes use violent rhetoric against the US and yet still choose to ally. It is a question of constituencies. However, it is also important to note that as time progresses, internalization of the Islamic norm continues and could harden Middle Eastern views toward the US, barring a change in the generally accepted perception of the West by Middle Eastern Muslims. According to the conclusions reached here, from the American perspective the short-term outlook is unchanged; Middle Eastern states will still seek to ally with the United States when it benefits them, and will only use Islam for legitimating rhetoric. However, the question remains as to whether or not there is a tipping point after which Islam becomes internalized in a great deal of states, and at which point alliance with the United States as the United States is currently seen from a policy perspective becomes impossible.

This tipping point,[79] if achieved, would lead to a fundamental reorientation of policy in the Middle East. In fact, it might lead to a realignment of whom the United States seeks to support, or a shift in other US foreign policy goals. If it is impossible to ally with Muslim states in the Mideast, the US may choose, for example, to engage other

states for natural resources, such as Russia, Venezuela, and Nigeria, and encourage their European and Japanese partners to do the same. On the other hand, continued Euro-Japanese dependence on Middle Eastern fossil fuels might lead those states to push themselves away from the US and take a policy position much closer to what the Islamic normative framework would call for, if this can be reconciled. Unlike Arabism, which could allow states to choose to align with either superpower, Islam leaves little choice but to eschew secularist regimes such as the US, especially if American support for Israel continues.

Conclusions

It is true that Islam has a significant impact on the international relations of the Middle East. However, this impact, as a form of "symbolic politics," comes in terms of domestic legitimation more than it governs international practice. Islamic politics is played in a two-level game where security concerns dominate the international arena but the domestic arena is focused on questions of legitimacy and the right for the leaders to take the actions they take. Since these leaders are not democratically elected, they must find legitimacy in other sources. In the past, it was Arabism. Now, Islam has arisen as a new source of legitimacy. This legitimacy is not only focused on state-society relations – because of certain arguments within Islam and doctrines held by Sunni Muslims, "being Muslim" has impact on international relations as well as domestic ones. However, this impact, at present, is minimal when compared to calculations on security. However, security considerations alone do not explain the methods by which Islamic states select their alliances with the United States and justify them.

---

[79] Finnemore and Sikkink 901 on tipping points.

What does this imply for change in the international system? Norms may change state preferences, but this analysis does not show a major effect on the foreign relations of states, at least with respect to security alliances. However, the potential remains for change to come through normative frameworks, as the logic of legitimation becomes more and more embedded within a state. Is it possible for norms to in fact change a state's conception of security? This has not been seen with respect to Islam, but it bears further study in that it is certainly imaginable. In addition, study of Islam as a normative framework may serve to show how religion affects the international system, an under-theorized topic. Religion is often examined as a relic of the past, especially in examinations of European international relations and the international relations of more "secular" states. And yet Islam serves as an example of religion dictating daily life, including political life. The idea of a religion as a norm may then mean that said religion can impact the international system in dynamic ways.

Further research

While this analysis has closely examined the impact which a particular norm – that of Islam – has had on the international relations of the Middle East, it is only one particular norm. Given that this study was inspired by the analysis of Arabism in *Dialogues in Arab Politics*, a fascinating subject for further study would be the relative power of Arabism versus Islam in the 20th century Middle East. It has been assumed in this research that in fact Islam has superseded Arabism as a dominant normative framework in the politics of the Middle East. This is the reason why the two cases, Saudi Arabia and Egypt, were chosen – one represents the state most responsible for Arabism, while the other is a state uneasy at times with the Arabist norm. Yet why is it that Islam

and not secular Arabism has such a power in the Middle East today? Is it simply a question of the 1967 war discrediting Arabism, while the 1973 war, fought in Islam's name, was perceived as more successful? Or is it something inherent about the norms themselves which lends to Islam a peculiar power alien to Arabism? While I do not know for sure, and would be interested in further examining the question, my initial intuitive response would be that in fact Islam is a more powerful normative framework than Arabism because of its deep roots. This is not to say that it is a more effective normative framework to be harnessed by elites, which may explain the hesitance of Middle Eastern leaders to use Islamic rhetoric and embrace the Islamic normative framework.

Other questions for examination here would include alternative hypotheses about alliance formation in general, rather than simply with the United States. Walt notes that "in the Arab world, the most important source of power has been the ability to manipulate one's own image and the image of one's rivals in the minds of other Arab elites."[80] This sounds very similar to the ideas of Arabism, but it then begs the question of whether or not this is true for Middle Easterners' Islamic identity as much as their Arab identity. As such, analysis of alliances among Islamic states and their relations could prove fruitful.

[80] Walt 149. I must say, after having read about the importance of capabilities and threats and the need to balance in Walt's account, this statement here was surprising to say the least- it sounded as if it were taken from Barnett. In fact, Barnett finds it curious as well – see Barnett 2.

Bibliography

Alterman, Jon B., ed. *Sadat and his Legacy: Egypt and the World, 1977-1997*. Washington, DC: Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 1998.

Barnett, Michael N. *Dialogues in Arab Politics*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1998.

Cooley, John K. "Pre-war Gulf diplomacy." *Survival* 33:2 (March/April 1991) 125-139.

Cordesman, Anthony H. *Saudi Arabia: Guarding the Desert Kingdom*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1997.

Dawisha, Adeed I. "Internal Values and External Threats: The Marking of Saudi Foreign Policy." *Orbis* 23:1 (1979).

Esposito, John L. *Islam and Politics*. 4th ed. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1998.

Finnemore, Martha, and Kathryn Sikkink. "International Norm Dynamics and Political Change." *International Organization* 52:4 (Autumn 1998) 887-917.

Freedman, Lawrence, and Ephraim Karsh. *The Gulf Conflict, 1990-1991*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993.

Juergensmeyer, Mark. *The New Cold War? Religious Nationalism Confronts the Secular State*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993.

Lippman, Thomas W. *Egypt After Nasser: Sadat, peace, and the mirage of prosperity*. New York: Paragon House, 1989.

Long, David E. *The United States and Saudi Arabia: Ambivalent Allies*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1985.

Maalouf, Amin. *The Crusades Through Arab Eyes*. New York: Schocken Books, 1984.

Miglietta, John P. *American Alliance Policy in the Middle East, 1945-1992: Iran, Israel, and Saudi Arabia*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2002.

Nyang, Sulayman, and Evan Hendricks. *A Line In the Sand*. P.T. Books, 1995.

Philpott, Daniel. "The Religious Roots of Modern International Relations." *World Politics* 52:2 (2000) 206-245.

Putnam, Robert D. "Diplomacy and Domestic Politics: The Logic of Two-Level Games." *International Organization* 42:3 (Summer 1998) 427-460.

Rashid, Nasser Ibrahim, and Esber Ibrahim Shaheen. *Saudi Arabia and the Gulf War*. Joplin, MO: International Institute of Technology, Inc., 1992.

Snyder, Jack Lewis. *From Voting To Violence*. New York: W. W. Norton, 2000.

Walt, Stephen M. *The Origins of Alliances*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1987.

Wendt, Alexander. *Social Theory of International Politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999.